DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 451 957 PS 029 420

AUTHOR	Halpern, Robert; Spielberger, Julie; Robb, Sylvan
TITLE	Evaluation of the MOST (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time) Initiative: Final Report. Summary of Findings. Discussion Paper.
INSTITUTION	Chicago Univ., IL. Chapin Hall Center for Children.
REPORT NO	CHAPIN-DP-PS-32
ISSN	ISSN-1097-3125
PUB DATE	2001-03-00
NOTE	36p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago, 1313 East 60th Street, Chicago, IL 60637. Tel: 773-753-5900; Fax: 773-753-5940; Web site: http://www.chapin.uchicago.edu.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	After School Centers; *After School Education; *After School Programs; *Change Strategies; Cost Effectiveness; Elementary Secondary Education; Low Income Groups; Models; Program Descriptions; Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; Program Improvement; Supply and Demand
IDENTIFIERS	Access to Services; Affordability; University of Chicago IL

ABSTRACT

The University of Chicago's Chapin Hall Center for Children conducted an evaluation of the first phase (1995-1998) of the MOST (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time) Initiative of the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds. The objectives of this initiative were to contribute to the supply, accessibility, affordability, and quality of after-school programs, especially for low-income children, and to strengthen the overall functioning of after-school programs as a "system," in three cities--Boston, Chicago, and Seattle. MOST was designed and implemented in recognition of the growing interest in after-school programs as one potential solution to current challenges facing children and their families. The evaluation found that MOST efforts yielded not only a variety of benefits, but hard-won lessons. In addition to concrete accomplishments in supply-building, staff training and development, facilities improvement, and program linkage to external resources, MOST raised the awareness of stakeholders in each city with respect to what an after-school system could be, and demonstrated the value of strategic thinking. The initiative helped clarify the resources needed and strategies that might be used in strengthening after-school programs as systems. Its general framework has served as an exemplar for other city- and state-level initiatives. MOST also shed light on some of the core issues facing the after-school field. For example, the initiative demonstrated that it is one thing to develop new supply, and another to assure that this supply is accessible, equitably distributed, affordable, of decent quality, and sustainable. The work of MOST exposed the quality problems characteristic of this field, and reminded us that strengthening programs requires a patient, long-term, multifaceted, adequately funded, and coordinated approach. (Contains 12 endnotes.) (Author)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 451 957

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

EVALUATION OF THE MOST (MAKING THE MOST OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME) INITIATIVE: FINAL REPORT

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago

Robert Halpern
Julie Spielberger
Sylvan Robb

PS 029420

DISCUSSION PAPER

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
T. Gonen
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
2A

March 2001

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

EVALUATION OF THE MOST (MAKING THE MOST OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME) INITIATIVE: FINAL REPORT

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the evaluation of the first phase (1995-1998) of the MOST (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time) Initiative of the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds. The objectives of this initiative were to contribute to the supply, accessibility, affordability, and quality of after-school programs, especially for low-income children, and to strengthen the overall functioning of after-school programs as a "system," in three cities—Boston, Chicago, and Seattle. MOST was designed and implemented in recognition of the growing interest in after-school programs as one potential solution to current challenges facing children and their families. MOST efforts yielded not only a variety of benefits, but hard-won lessons. In addition to concrete accomplishments in supply-building, staff training and development, improving facilities, and linking programs to external resources, MOST raised the awareness of stakeholders in each city with respect to what an after-school system could be, and it demonstrated the value of strategic thinking. It helped clarify the resources needed and strategies that might be used in strengthening after-school programs as systems. Its general framework has served as an exemplar for other city- and state-level initiatives. MOST also shed light on some of the core issues facing the after-school field. For example, MOST demonstrated that it is one thing to develop new supply, and another to assure that this supply is accessible, equitably distributed, affordable, of decent quality, and sustainable. The work of MOST exposed the quality problems characteristic of this field, and reminded us that strengthening programs requires a patient, long-term, multifaceted, adequately funded and coordinated approach.

Robert Halpern
Julie Spielberger
Sylvan Robb

March 2001

Chapin Hall Center for Children

The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago was established in 1985 as a research and development center dedicated to bringing sound information, rigorous analyses, innovative ideas, and an independent perspective to the ongoing public debate about the needs of children and the ways in which those needs can best be met.

The Center focuses its work on all children, while devoting special attention to children facing special risks or challenges, such as poverty, abuse and neglect, and mental and physical illness. The contexts in which children are supported—primarily their families and communities—are of particular interest.

Chapin Hall's work is shaped by a dual commitment to the worlds of research and policy. This requires that our work meet both the exacting standards of university research and the practical needs of policy and program development, and that we work to advance knowledge and to disseminate it.

Chapin Hall is committed to diversity not only of race, ethnicity gender, sexual orientation, and physical ability but also of experience, discipline, and viewpoint.

Chapin Hall's commitment to all children, with special attention to those experiencing or at risk of serious problems, is reflected in the range of the Center's research projects and publications. The following represent the Center's major areas of endeavor:

- Children's services, covering the problems that threaten children and the services designed to address them, including child welfare, mental health, and the juvenile court
- Primary supports, concerning the resources in communities that enhance the development and well-being of all children, but may be especially important to children who are poor or otherwise disadvantaged
- Community building, focusing on the development, documentation, and evaluation of community-building initiatives designed to make communities more supportive of children and families
- Schools' connections with children's services, primary supports, and communities, examining the range of institutions that foster children's learning and development, including not only schools but also families, businesses, services, communities, and the relationships, actual and potential, among them
- International projects, covering Chapin Hall's recent and growing involvement with children's policy researchers and research centers in other countries
- Special activities and consultations, covering a range of projects, often undertaken in collaboration or consultation with other organizations

Discussion Paper PS-32

© 2001 by Chapin Hall Center for Children

A complete list of Chapin Hall publications is
available at our Web site, www.chapin.uchicago.edu.

Phone 773/753-5900 Fax: 773/753-5940

ISSN: 1097-3125

CONTENTS

Introduction 1

The MOST Strategy 1

The Evaluation Design 4

Key Findings from the Descriptive Studies 6

- Sponsorship and Supply 6
- The Quality of After-School Programs 10
- Cost and Revenue Study 12

The Effects of MOST 14

- Efforts to Contribute to Supply, Affordability, and Accessibility 14
- Program Improvement Efforts 15
- Further Findings 22

MOST as a System-Building Initiative 23

- Effects of MOST System-Building Efforts 24

Conclusions 25

Evaluation of the MOST (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time) Initiative: Final Report Summary of Findings

Robert Halpern
Julie Spielberger
Sylvan Robb

In this summary of the final report,[1] Chapin Hall Center for Children presents the principal findings from its evaluation of the MOST (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time) Initiative of the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds[2] (the Fund). The report focuses on the first phase of the initiative, launched in 1995 and ending in the summer of 1998. A second phase began in the fall of 1998 and will continue through the summer of 2001.[3] The objectives of that first phase were to contribute to the supply, accessibility, affordability, and quality of after-school programs, especially for low-income children, and to strengthen the overall functioning of after-school programs as a "system" in three cities—Boston, Chicago, and Seattle.

INTRODUCTION

Just a decade ago, the phrase "after-school programs" was hardly heard in debate about how to better meet the developmental and support needs of low- and moderate-income children. After-school programs are now high on many people's lists of potential solutions to the challenges facing children and their families.[4] Such programs are seen to meet children's needs for physical exercise and safe spaces to play, for enriched developmental experiences in expressive arts and sports, and for individualized attention from caring adults. After-school programs are also increasingly seen among some in both the public and private sectors as an opportunity to extend the school day and provide more formal instructional time.

In the face of growing interest stands a field that is a mixture of contrasting elements: identifiable, and yet extraordinarily heterogeneous; vibrant, and yet fragile; a protected space for play and exploration, yet increasingly burdened with compensatory tasks. After-school programs typically strive to foster staff-child relationships that are warm and supportive. Yet staff stability is minimal; and most staffs have little or no formal preparation for work with children. After-school providers are beginning to think and act more collectively, and funders and policy makers are beginning to consider them as a distinct field of services. Yet sponsors and funders still bring to the table a range of starkly contrasting visions of what after-school programs should be about.

Moreover, after-school programs for low-income children remain inadequately and insecurely funded, and the financial and other resources that do exist typically are not coordinated and directed in accordance with any overarching vision or goals. MOST was designed and implemented both to build on the many strengths inherent in this field and to begin to address its vulnerabilities.

THE MOST STRATEGY

MOST was originally conceived in discussions in the early 1990s between Michelle Seligson, formerly the director of the National Institute on Out-of-School Time, and staff at the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds. Seligson had long been concerned about the quality of after-school programs, and felt strongly that new structures needed to be created to support the professional preparation of frontline and supervisory staff. The Fund staff and board were also concerned about the supply of affordable after-school program slots for low-income children, and the two sets of concerns served as the basis for an initiative whose initial vision was "to

support collaborative, community-wide efforts to improve the quality and availability of after-school programs" in a small number of cities. As one Fund document put it, the goals would be to "create collaborative structures that would assess needs, develop strategies, and share resources to improve the supply and quality of after-school programs."

The need for citywide strategies and what would eventually come to be called a *system-building approach* was clear. At the outset, each city reflected some distinct strengths, in terms of a history of collaborative efforts, communication among stakeholders, and strategic planning. In fact, the participating cities were selected by the Fund on the basis of their potential to implement a citywide initiative. At the same time, each city's universe of after-school programs, resource and support organizations, and funders and regulatory agencies could not be considered a "system," in the sense of a variety of individual elements working together to form a unity or common whole. To differing degrees, leadership within each city was diffuse and informal. Some providers and organizations viewed themselves as part of a common enterprise, others did not. Individual resource and support organizations and funders tended to act autonomously, often paying little heed to others. Communication and relationships among stakeholders varied from strong to nonexistent. Some neighborhoods were well served by after-school programs; others had few or no programs. There was no mechanism for identifying obstacles faced by children and families in gaining access to after-school programs, and for developing strategies to address those obstacles. There was no mechanism for helping programs identify and make effective use of curricular resources or training. Many programs needing resource supports had insufficient information about what might be available, while many resource organizations were unable to reach programs most needing their resources. There was also no citywide planning and priority setting, and therefore no mechanisms for considering and making strategic investments that would strengthen the local system as a whole.

MOST took on these roles, within a framework set by the funder's objectives, and recognition that each city presented a distinct context for system building. The basic idea was to create opportunities, reasons, and mechanisms for the variety of organizations with a stake in the after-school field to work together more effectively to address issues of supply, access, affordability and quality. The process began in each city with a year-long planning exercise, involving a wide cross-section of stakeholders in the field, with the purpose of creating an action plan to serve as a framework and guide for an initial three-year implementation phase (June 1995-June 1998). Coincidentally, this process also served to strengthen relationships, and provided a symbolic basis for different stakeholders to begin to see themselves as part of a common enterprise.

The Fund provided $1.4 million over the three years to each of the participating cities to implement their plans, of which $200,000 was specifically targeted for facilities improvements. In all three cities, MOST funds were channeled to community foundations, who then contracted with a lead agency or agencies to manage the initiative, disburse funds, and as one lead agency staffer described it, shepherd a system into existence. The cities combined their grants with matching public and/or private dollars. The lead agencies were Parents United for Child Care in Boston; the Day Care Action Council in Chicago; and a collaborative of four organizations—School's Out Consortium, Child Care Resources, the Department of Human Services, and Seattle Central Community College—in Seattle.

The lead organizations in each city oversaw a multifaceted implementation strategy, consisting of two closely related sets of activities. The first, alluded to above, had the lead agency bring stakeholders in the after-school program system together in volunteer committees and working groups to set priorities for use of MOST funds, do joint planning, share information, coordinate activities, forge new links, and begin to develop city-wide strategies for addressing the challenges facing after-school programs as a collective. Committees and working groups were "staffed" by lead agency personnel, and

membership consisted of providers, staff of resource and support organizations, city agency officials, community leaders, parents, and others.

The second set of activities, flowing from the first, involved provision of funds directly to after-school programs and their sponsoring agencies, to agencies wishing to start after-school programs, and to organizations that supported programs (with training, technical assistance, curricular resources and so forth) and/or provided information and referrals to families. These funds were typically distributed through an RFP process, utilizing volunteer peer reviewers, and more selectively through subcontracts with organizations providing some form of distinct expertise. MOST and matching funds were used to support a wide range of strategies and activities. Put differently, MOST worked on many fronts at once, especially during the first two years of the initiative. Table 1 summarizes the strategies implemented in one or more of the cities, during the first three years of the initiative.

Table 1

Summary of MOST Strategies

BUILDING SUPPLY AND IMPROVING ACCESS

- funding the start-up of new programs, focused largely on underserved neighborhoods and/or underserved populations, and providing technical assistance to those programs for a minimum of a year
- funding the creation of satellite sites for existing programs
- partially or fully subsidizing new slots in existing programs
- providing funds to make existing slots more affordable
- providing grants to allow programs to hire more staff
- funding facilities improvements that would increase capacity
- preparing programs and their staff to be able to serve disabled children (thus increasing access to after-school programs for those children)
- collecting information on and addressing transportation-related obstacles to access
- engaging in public education efforts to raise awareness of the need for more after-school programs
- developing and disseminating information for parents on the availability and location of programs
- generating information on the distribution of existing programs and supply, for planning purposes

PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

Investing in facilities, equipment, and materials:

- funding facilities and equipment improvements (e.g., rehabilitating or reorganizing existing space, building new space, fixing up a playground, refurbishing gym floors, purchasing gym equipment, purchasing air conditioners, upgrading wiring, etc.)
- providing grants for the purchase of curricular and learning materials (e.g., science packets or books or art supplies, camera equipment or computer software)
- supporting technical assistance on facilities- and space use-related issues (e.g., help from an architect or space design planner)

Investing in individual program staff:

- supporting the creation of post-secondary courses, and trying to encourage higher education institutions to develop specialties in after-school programming
- subsidizing tuition for post-secondary courses
- sponsoring conferences, workshops, and training events

Table 1 continued on next page.

Table 1

continued

- support for mentoring of new staff by experienced staff
- funding on-site training on specific topics
- supporting the development of standards or competencies for staff (including development of school-age certificates)
- supporting efforts to develop career lattices or pathways

Investing in/working with programs as a whole:

- promoting "quality" standards, and funding programs to undertake structured self-assessment guided by those standards (set by and linked to an accreditation system sponsored by the National School-Age Care Alliance)
- supporting long-term and short-term technical assistance, focused on programs as a whole or on particular issues (e.g., inclusion, classroom design), sometimes linked to grants for other purposes (e.g., program start-up grants)
- providing grants to start new program components or activities (e.g., a choir or photography club)
- developing mechanisms and providing funds for linking "curricular" resource organizations (e.g., in arts, sports, culture) and after-school programs, for example, directly funding curricular resource organizations to work with after-school programs, or providing funds for them to manage their own RFP process
- helping link organizations that provide volunteers to after-school programs
- developing resource libraries
- creating mutual support networks among after-school programs, and support for collaborative efforts between programs

SYSTEM BUILDING

- bringing together different stakeholders in the after-school system, in committees and working groups, for joint planning, priority-setting, and information sharing
- nurturing leadership within the after-school community by involving a variety of people and organizations in the governance and implementation of MOST
- working to expand stakeholders' understanding of the diversity of the after-school system
- facilitating the creation of new working relationships, collaborations, and networks
- encouraging public institutions to support school-age care
- broadening the funding base for school-age care
- engaging in public education and advocacy
- using MOST funds to leverage other resources for supply-building, improving access, and program improvement

THE EVALUATION DESIGN

In 1996, the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds contracted with Chapin Hall Center for Children to conduct an evaluation of MOST. The evaluation had three overall purposes:

- to describe and categorize MOST strategies in each city
- to examine the effectiveness of these strategies in contributing to supply, accessibility, and affordability, in strengthening programs, and in bringing greater coherence to the after-school program system as a whole
- to generate descriptive information on important dimensions of the after-school program system in each city (supply, program quality, and financing), in order to provide context for understanding and explaining MOST efforts, and to aid future investment in the field

The evaluation team relied on a variety of methods to secure the data needed to address these purposes:

- interviews with MOST staff; staff of after-school programs, host organizations, support organizations, funders, regulators, and others in each city; and staff of the National Institute on Out-of-School Time
- observation of MOST committees and working groups, and MOST-sponsored training events and workshops
- observation of after-school programs in each city—both those involved in one or more ways with MOST and others not involved
- collection of existing administrative data (particularly on supply and financing) from programs and sponsoring agencies, funders, and regulatory agencies
- examination and analysis of proposals, reports, meeting minutes, and other documents from the MOST lead agencies, committees and working groups, and grantees

Some interviews, observations, analysis of records and reports focused on describing or tracing the discrete impact of a specific MOST investment or activity, and some on trying to determine the collective impact of a number of activities. At times, the evaluators focused on individual staff, at times on individual programs or resource organizations, and at times on the "system" as a whole.

The evaluation presented a number of conceptual and methodological challenges. To start with, MOST had no comparison sites, and since the evaluation began more than a year and a half after the initiative had gotten underway, it was difficult to establish a true baseline on many outcome dimensions. The evaluation team nonetheless sought to determine whether MOST investments and efforts created things—whether new programs or affordable after-school slots, new relationships and linkages between individuals or organizations, a reorganized program schedule or classroom environment, new program activities, improved facilities or new materials, etc.—*that had not existed before*, and *probably would not have been created* in the natural course of a particular program's or resource organization's life, or in the evolution of the after-school program system in each city, *had MOST not existed.* This was not always easy in an evolving policy and financing environment, and in light of the fact that in the normal course of events individual after-school programs and their staff have a variety of contacts with outside organizations and resources.

A second, and related, challenge involved identifying the boundaries of MOST and deciding what should be considered a MOST activity, since MOST was a partial funder and participant in some activities that also were funded/sponsored by other organizations. For instance, when MOST subsidized part of the cost of a new slot, or when MOST funds were used to make an existing slot more affordable, how was each to be counted? Finally, each of the three major outcome domains presented its own distinct conceptual and methodological issues. For instance, how important a factor was sustainability of a new or more affordable slot? How much and what sort of program improvement was reasonable to expect from any discrete strategy—for example, a staff member's participation in a post-secondary course or a workshop, or monthly technical assistance visit over the course of a program year?

System building is a slow, trial-and-error process, and many seeds planted in the first three years of the initiative have only just begun to bear fruit.

In considering the findings of the first-phase evaluation, it is important to bear in mind that MOST is an ongoing initiative. System building is a slow, trial-and-error process, and many seeds planted in the first three years of the initiative have only just begun to bear fruit. The lessons learned in the first phase provided the foundation for later progress in the three cities, and should therefore be useful to others interested in addressing the basic issues facing the after-school field. On the following pages, we first discuss findings from the three descriptive studies—on sponsorship and supply, program quality, and financing—and then report on the effectiveness of MOST strategies. In-depth descriptions of MOST strategies and activities can be found in the full report.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE DESCRIPTIVE STUDIES

Sponsorship and Supply

The purposes of this first, exploratory study were to identify the range of agencies and organizations providing after-school programs in each city, to develop a rough estimate of aggregate supply and to clarify the methods needed to measure supply. The study required the evaluation team to identify existing sources of administrative data on supply; reconcile them; and make preliminary inferences about the value of the information. The evaluation team also collected data from individual programs and agencies in order to check the reliability of the databases, to fill in blanks—in some cases large blanks—left by those databases, and to reconcile any differences found between different data sources. Measuring supply proved difficult, for a number of reasons. The evaluation team had to determine which programs and activities to include or exclude. It was often difficult to determine the basis of existing information (i.e., how it had been gathered and the criteria involved). Finally, the diversity of programs and activities complicated the task of converting data into a common metric of full-time-equivalent slots.

The diversity of the field has all kinds of implications, for a major policy initiative's financing strategies, the design of training and technical assistance, and not least for expectations.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the supply study yielded two central findings. The first was that the after-school field is made up of a wide range—and diverse group—of providers, and the role and importance of particular providers varies from city to city. The second finding was that only a modest proportion of low-income children in each city actually participate in after-school programs.

The largest providers of after-school programming to low- and moderate-income children are private, nonprofit social service agencies and schools. The former category is itself heterogeneous, including child care centers (about 20 percent of whose slots go to school-age children), settlement houses, community centers, child and family service agencies, and national youth-serving organizations, particularly Boys and Girls Clubs and YMCAs. In some cities, parks and recreation departments (or park districts) are major providers, and libraries are a still-small, but growing provider. Catholic schools provide some after-school programming, as do churches, ethnic mutual assistance associations, selected public housing authorities, a rapidly growing group of tutoring/mentoring organizations, and even a few community development corporations. Tables 2a, 2b, and 2c list some of the larger providers in each city, and the numbers of children they serve.

The supply study found that the proportion of programming provided by each type of organization varies widely from city to city, and neighborhood to neighborhood. Some neighborhoods lack any providers; some may have two or three, who may provide complementary services or find themselves competing for the same children. There is also a growing trend for different organizations to work together to provide programs. Schools are particularly likely to provide rented or donated space for programs run by other agencies, and occasionally run programs jointly with them. But almost any kind of arrangement can be found. For instance in Seattle, the city parks and recreation department funds some school-based programs operated by community-based agencies, serving middle school children.

The diversity of the field has all kinds of implications, for a major policy initiative's financing strategies, the design of training and technical assistance, and not least for expectations. This diversity has significant advantages that must be considered (and to the extent possible preserved), acknowledged, and supported in large after-school initiatives. For instance, it allows for greater child and family choice, and probably increases the likelihood that there will be at least one or two programs in most low-income neighborhoods. Some children who start out in the early childhood programs of community-based agencies continue in their after-school programs.

Table 2a

Selected Boston Out-of-School Time Providers[a]

Institution/Organization	# Sites	Number/Types of Programs	Est. # Children
Bell Foundation[b]	8	8 after-school programs	250
Boston Community Centers	36	27 after-school programs 9 before-school programs	900 - 1,000
Boston Public Schools[c]	14	14 extracurricular activities or after-school programs	300
Boys and Girls Clubs	4	4 after-school and drop-in programs	1,200
Citizen Schools	5	5 after-school programs	250
East Boston Social Center	2	2 after-school programs	134
Federated Dorchester Neighborhood Houses	3	3 after-school programs	156
YMCA	14	14 after-school programs	750
Boston Public Library[d]	16+	no formal programs; occasional tutoring or homework assistance	n/a
Religious Institutions[e]	n/a	n/a	n/a

Notes:

(a) Unless otherwise noted, estimates are based on information obtained from the 1997 *PUCC Guide to Before and After School Programs* and data provided by the Office of Child Care Services. Based on interviews with PUCC staff, family child care providers are not a significant source of school-age care children; a very small number are licensed to serve school-age children, and only a few do.

(b) Some Bell Foundation programs are located in Cambridge.

(c) Refers to programs operated by school personnel and governed by Department of Education regulations (i.e., they are not covered under regulations governing other school-age care programs). We do not have information on the nature of these programs, such as duration, content, and participation.

(d) According to PUCC staff, children drop in to libraries after school but library staff are not equipped to supervise them and often complain about discipline problems.

(e) No information was available on church-based programs at the time of the supply study; however, MOST/ BSACCP has begun to form relationships with religious groups that have asked for assistance in developing out-of-school time programs.

Table 2b

Chicago Out-of-School Time Providers

Institution/Organization	# Sites	Number/Types of Programs[a]	Est. # Children[b]
Social Service/Youth Agencies[c]			
Boys and Girls Clubs	20	5 after-school	192
		20 drop-in clubs	3,500
Carole Robertson Center	2	2 before-/after-school	150
Casa Central	2	2 after-school	100
Center for New Horizons	8	1 after-school	60
Chicago Commons	4	4 after-school	173
Chicago Youth Centers	8	8 after-school	750
Chinese American Service League	2	1 after-school	35
Christopher House	6	2 before-/after-school	104
Erie Neighborhood House	2	1 after-school	84

Table 2b continued on next page.

Table 2b

continued

Institution/Organization	# Sites	Number/Types of Programs[a]	Est. # Children[b]
Family Matters	1	1 after-school	25
Firman Community Services	3	1 after-school	70
Hull House	6	5 after-school	218
Hyde Park Neighborhood Club	1	1 before-/after-school	6[illegible]
Laurence Armour Day School	1	1 after-school	40
Marcy-Newberry Association	5	4 after-school	300
Marillac Social Center	2	1 after-school	222
Catholic Charities	7	1 after-school	88
YMCA of Metropolitan Chicago	12	8 after-school	450
YWCA of Chicago	6	3 after-school	180
Chicago Housing Authority	5	2 after-school programs	76
Chicago Park District			
Park Kids	83[d]	83 after-school programs	8,816[e]
Chicago Public Schools			
Lighthouse Program	145-313[f]	145-313 academic enrichment after-school	17,400 37,500[f]
After-School Academies	50	50 after-school	11,793
Social Centers	400	400 drop-in	8,000
Elementary School Sports Program	465	Multiple sports programs	26,000
Chicago Public Library	72	Drop-in use of resources, story hours, arts, homework help	4,500
Catholic Archdiocese Parochial Schools	166[g]	Informal after-school recreation and homework help; some before-school programs	8,000
Religious Institutions	n/a	Church-based after-school programs or activities	n/a
Family Child Care Providers	860[h]	Day care homes licensed to serve school-age children	1,300
Mentoring and Tutoring Programs			
After School Action Program	30	Community-based after-school activities 1-5 days/week	800
Tutor/Mentor Connection	300	Community-based programs available once or twice a week	3,000

Notes:

(a) Most of these providers also serve children during the summer months.

(b) The *interpretation* of these numbers differs from one provider to another; i.e., a number may represent program capacity, enrollment, *or* participation. Numbers usually are for the 1996-1997 program year, although Park District figures were updated for 1997-1998. Age of children served varies from provider to provider e.g., except for Chicago Youth Centers, all of the after-school programs in the first category are part of the state subsidy system and only serve children through the age of 12; drop-in programs and programs provided by other kinds of institutions may serve children older than 12.

(c) This is not an exhaustive list of social service agencies providing school-age care and programs in Chicago, but it does include the major providers. Cook County Resource and Referral database figures obtained in January 1998 indicated "slots" for 11,009 school-age children in 242 licensed and license-exempt child care centers at that time. Figures obtained in April 1999 list only 195 programs with a total capacity of 7,709; the lower number reflects changes in the definition of a school-age program.

(d) According to the Park Kids Program Specialist, 70 programs were to be open during 1998-1999.

(e) This number includes 6,929 registrants and 1,187 drop-ins. The average daily attendance was 5,323. The total figure of 8,816 is lower than the number (10,181) reported by the Park District for 1996-1997, which may reflect the fact that the Public Schools have opened more after-school programs. Thirteen Park

Kids programs were eliminated for 1998-99 because of decreased enrollment or because some communities wanted special activity classes instead.

(f) The lower number, 145, was obtained in the fall of 1997. In the fall of 1998, we were told that the program actually operated in 248 elementary schools during 1997-1998 and would be expanded to 313 schools in 1998-1999.

(g) This number may be somewhat lower now because of school closings and/or consolidations in the parochial school system.

(h) Figures for family child care providers are current as of April 1999 (Source: Cook County R and R).

Table 2c

Seattle Out-of-School Time Providers

Institution/Organization	# Sites	Number/Types of Programs[a]	Est. # Children[b]
Social Service/Youth Agencies[c]			
Ballard Boys and Girls Clubs	4	4 after-school, 3 before-school, 4 drop-in	190
Campfire Boys and Girls	2	2 before-/after-school	95
Community Day School Association	4	4 before-/after-school	168
Evergreen Association	4	4 before-/after-school	250
Wallingford Boys and Girls	4	4 before-/after-school, 3 drop-in	240
YMCA	7	6 before-/after-school, 2 drop-in	440
MOST/FEL-Funded Programs			
Asian Counseling and Referral Services	1	1 peer tutor/mentoring	32
Catholic Community Services	1	1 tutoring	30
Chinese Information and Service Center	1	1 after-school	25
Community Day School	1	1 tutoring/after-school	20
El Centro de la Raza	1	1 after-school	20
Garfield CC	1	1 middle-school day camp	30
ReWA	1	1 Bilingual Reader's Theatre: ESL/literacy	20
Seattle Emergency Housing Services	1	1 youth	25
Seattle Indian Center	1	1 after-school	30
Southwest Youth and Family Services	1	1 youth	20
Seattle Parks and Recreation			
Community Centers	24	23 before/after-school, 23 drop-in	6,200
ASAP Programs	16[d]	16 middle-school	n/a
Seattle Public Library	24	4 SPLASH; some computers, homework help	700
Religious Institutions[e]	n/a	n/a	n/a
Family Child Care Providers	327	Day care homes licensed for school-age children	500
Mentoring and Tutoring Programs			
Homework Centers	n/a	School-sponsored homework centers	n/a
Powerful Schools	5	Community enrichment classes in school buildings	350

Notes:

(a) Most of these providers also serve children during the summer.

(b) Figures do not include participation in drop-in programs. Most information was current as of the fall of 1997.

(c) List includes major providers but is not a complete inventory of social service agencies providing out-of-school time care and programs in Seattle.

(d) ASAP programs were expected to increase in number in 1998-1999 under the new Families and Education Levy.

(e) According to a 1998 Church Council preliminary report, churches provide a variety of programs and services for youth and families but data on out-of-school time programs for school-age children were not available.

The agency and its staff come to know those children well, and the agency becomes a second home and family. Small, neighborhood-based providers play an important role in strengthening the social fabric of their neighborhoods. The diversity of the field suggests that it does not make sense to develop major initiatives that rely on only one or two kinds of providers. Likewise, funding streams should not be directed at only particular kinds of providers. Diversity also poses some distinct challenges to this field. It contributes to the wide range of goals, guiding assumptions and priorities among programs. And it complicates the tasks of field and system-building.

The second key finding of the Chapin Hall supply study concerns participation rates. Only a modest percentage of low-income children in each city participate in after-school programs. Assuming that [illegible] of the school-age children living within city limits are from low- to moderate-income families, it is estimated that no more than 10 to 15 percent of low-income children participate in regular (i.e., daily, running through the year) programs in Boston and Chicago, and a somewhat higher percentage—roughly, 35 percent—in Seattle. Another 10 to 15 percent of children participate in episodic (e.g., twice a week) or cyclical programs.

Why do only a moderate percentage of low-income children participate in after-school programs? One reason is inadequate public financing (discussed shortly), which limits both the number of "slots" and parental demand. Sponsoring agencies cannot find resources or lack motivation to create new slots or sites, and cannot find resources to adequately subsidize existing ones. Low-income parents' interest in after-school programs is "inelastic" in economic terms, high when programs are free or nearly so, dropping sharply the more they are asked to pay. Parents believe that if necessary they can leave their older children unsupervised and their younger children in sibling care for a few hours. Some parents will pay a modest amount to a neighbor or relative to provide care when needed. As children get older, their own and their friends' preferences also influence the demand side of the equation. Other factors limiting participation include difficulties in getting children from school to neighborhood programs; lack of parental awareness of available options; and, not least, lack of parental wherewithal—motivation, confidence, skill, energy, and/or persistence—to seek out and enroll children in programs

Substantially more research clearly is needed on both aggregate and neighborhood-level supply-and-demand dynamics in this field. The relation between supply and financing is a central topic for research. Most useful, though, would be multivariate research: For instance how do the variables suggested above—adequacy of financing and cost to individual consumers (i.e., parents), parents' and children's preferences—interact with the number and types of programs in a community and the quality of those programs? If public funding were to grow substantially, it is not clear that there would be enough providers and staff in some neighborhoods to create new supply, especially supply of adequate quality. How do the public and private sectors interact in this field? Practical research mapping existing supply across different neighborhoods in a city would also be useful for planning purposes.

Estimated Supply of After-School Programs in the MOST Cities in Relation to Total Number of Elementary and Middle School Age Children

	Number of Full-Time Spaces Available	Number of School-Age Children	Percentage of Children Served
Boston	8000	56,000	14
Chicago	35,000	350,000	10
Seattle	14,000	40,000	35

The Quality of After-School Programs

This second descriptive study sought to develop an understanding of the quality of after-school programs serving low-income children in the three MOST cities. The primary source of data was in-depth observations of ten programs, during three visits over the course of a program year (1997-1998). The programs were selected in consultation with NIOST and MOST staff,

using three criteria: variety in sponsorship, moderate to substantial involvement in MOST, and an interest in building a relatively representative sample of programs. The evaluation team sought to confirm findings from this study using program observation records from the ASQ pilot, and by querying knowledgeable informants about their perceptions of program quality in each city. [5]

The study was guided by a definition of good after-school programs developed for purposes of the evaluation, drawing on the child development literature, previous work in the field, and existing standards.[6] The attributes used to guide the program observations included:

- warm, reliable, supportive staff who have the background and skills to create interesting, varied activities and an adequate level of staff literacy to help children with learning support needs
- an adequate number of staff to provide individual attention to children
- clear rules and adequate supervision, yet social and physical space for children to be on their own, away from adult oversight and direction
- a well-defined yet flexible and relaxed program schedule, with variety and choice in program activities, including: some time for help with homework and for reading and writing for pleasure and self-expression, opportunities to test interests and skills in expressive arts and sports, exposure to both one's own heritage and the larger culture, and not least, time for unstructured play and simple fun
- nutritious snacks, provided on a flexible schedule to meet the needs of individual children
- indoor and outdoor facilities, equipment and materials adequate to allow the above good things to happen

The observations (organized as case studies in the full final report) suggested that, although the programs had a mixture of strengths and weaknesses, most fell short on the majority of the quality attributes identified above. Children generally were comfortable and, at least, partially engaged. Most programs strove to create a relaxed atmosphere, and about half were flexible in structuring participation in activities. Many programs afforded a weekly opportunity to participate in dance or theater or art, opportunities that probably would not have been available otherwise to participating children. A program coordinator in Chicago noted that the children he served have so little that "Small things at a center take on great importance: snacks in the afternoon, a trip to the museum, individual attention . . . a kind word from a group leader." Another, in discussing homework time, noted that many of her children's homes do not have the basic resources for homework, adding "We have encyclopedias here, dictionaries, rulers, everything you need to deal with your homework, plus a quiet place to do it." The cross-age grouping in some programs provided opportunities for children to help each other. Even when staff seemed a bit abrupt, or did not appear to really observe and listen to children, they were generally affectionate, and staff-child relationships were comfortable.

The second key finding of the supply study concerns participation rates. Only a modest percentage of low-income children in each city participate in after-school programs.

Yet, there was often considerable room for improvement on a number of program dimensions. Some programs were too thinly staffed to learn individual children's interests or attend to their support needs. A few had both strong and very weak staff. A few were too closely bound to their schedules, moving children from one segment of the afternoon to the next in rigid, prescribed steps. Staff did not always know how to gauge children's interests, or how to plan and facilitate children's engagement in activities. Activities and projects were usually short-term, and often seemed designed with relatively little thought. In cases in which staff felt compelled to assume a teacher-like identity, they too often displayed the worst qualities of teachers (i.e., those involving gratuitous or excessive group control), rather than the best.

Although the program observations were not specifically designed to determine the possible causes of quality prob-

lems in the after-school field, they, along with the other research that was part of MOST, point to two key factors. These are inadequate funding and the composition of the workforce. As will be described in detail shortly, revenues to programs serving low-income children fall short—sometimes far short—of resources needed to maintain even minimal-quality programs. Inadequate funding affects program quality in a number of ways. It leads to thinly staffed programs, limiting individual attention to children. It limits programs' ability to provide choice in activities, to purchase adequate supplies and materials to create a rich classroom environment. It leads to lack of resources for management functions, ranging from fund-raising for a program, to program planning to supervision of frontline staff. (It also limits other agency supports of frontline practice, such as substitutes to free staff for professional development.) It leads to lack of resources for capital investment and improvements, for facilities and equipment. Not least, it lowers wages and benefits, which in turn hampers programs' ability to recruit and retain good staff.

Revenues to programs serving low-income children fall short—sometimes far short—of resources needed to maintain even minimal-quality programs.

The current composition of the after-school program workforce itself constrains program quality. Although coordinators and directors often have bachelor's degrees, and occasionally master's degrees, frontline staff, though for the most part dedicated and caring, usually have little or no formal preparation for work with children. Most staffs have a high school education, and perhaps some college credits. A handful are college students, and may be majoring in a related field, such as elementary education.

Existing staff bring some native strengths to their work with children—college students provide a certain enthusiasm; older staff sometimes possess a parent-like demeanor. But part-time jobs with no benefits, paying hourly wages in the $5 to $9 range (see next page), are unlikely to attract skilled child development professionals.[7] That means that no one has prepared frontline staff for the work they have to do—design interesting activities for children (both short- and long-term), help children engage in those activities, and attend to the distinct developmental needs of children of different ages. Some staffs have limited experiences with institutions and resources outside their neighborhoods. Some have limited literacy skills, constraining their ability to help with homework and other literacy-related activities.

Most frontline staffs, and some coordinators, have part-time positions, exacerbating the lack of planfulness in too many after-school programs. Staffs are often only one step ahead of the children in their control over each program day. Part-time positions attract people less likely to stay with the field. A YMCA administrator told us that "For a lot of the group workers and group worker assistants, its convenient for them to go to school in the morning and then come to the program in the afternoon. So once they finish school they want a full-time position. That's when the turnover hits." Turnover leads to long periods of understaffing. It limits children's sense of continuity and stability. And it sets program improvement efforts back, often to the beginning. One supervisor noted that "It's like starting over when you lose your really strong, really solid staff."

Cost and Revenue Study

As with supply and program quality, the Chapin Hall team found a lack of basic information in the after-school field on various dimensions of financing, a key factor in determining how and whether MOST might achieve its goals. The evaluation team undertook a rudimentary cost, expenditure, and source-of-revenue study in the three cities. The primary source of data for this study was budgets from about forty individual programs in Boston, a third of which are school-based, and about ten each in Chicago and Seattle. The team also collected some information from large public and private providers, such as schools and park districts.[8]

Program Costs

The full cost of providing a five-day-a-week program (i.e., the resources needed to adequately run the program) appears to range from $65 to $95 per child per week, with the average being about $80 per week. This translates into $4,000 per child for a 50-week year. Subtracting contributed or in-kind costs, the full cost appears to be about $50-$60 per child per week, or $2,500-$3,000 per child for a 50-week year. The largest and most consistent component of cost in after-school programs is salaries and fringe benefits (about 65 to 80 percent of the total). The remaining costs are rent and utilities, nutrition (snacks), supplies and equipment, liability insurance, transportation, stipends for tutors or volunteers, and hourly fees for specialists (e.g., art or dance teachers). Some programs also include a line item for professional development. The percentage of total cost attributable to each of these components varies widely from program to program. For example, rent and utilities, while averaging about 15 to 20 percent of costs, can vary from none to as much as 30 percent. Food can be as little as 1 or 2 percent or as much as 10 percent of a budget.

Salaries for frontline staff were found to range from about $5 to $9 per hour, averaging about $7 per hour, similar to those in early childhood child care. The majority of frontline positions offer few or no benefits. Salaries for coordinators ranged from $8-$15 per hour.

Program-to-program variability in costs were due to differences in schedules (hours per week), staffing structure, group size, and staff-to-child ratios, as well as sponsoring agency policies. Large youth-serving organizations and public agencies such as park districts tend to pay higher salaries than smaller community-based agencies. Differences in rent and utilities also contributed to variability in costs. Some programs provide full-day services on days when school is closed due to a holiday, teacher "institute" or related factors; others did not. Other factors being equal, the more a program was enriched with arts, martial arts, sports or other activities requiring specialized teachers (who typically charge between $15 and $30 per class), the higher the cost per child.

Program Revenues

We defined revenue as the amount of money a program had at its disposal to expend for a particular program year. Our analysis focused on both sources and amount of revenue, including an examination of revenue in relation to costs. Sources of revenue for after-school programs in the study included public funding, primarily child care subsidies, and small amounts from single-purpose sources designed to prevent specific problems or offer specific types of programs; parent fees; private funding from United Ways, corporate or community foundations, or donations; and indirectly, in-kind contributions. On average it appears that public funding, from child care subsidies and other sources, provided about 40 to 50 percent of program revenues; parent fees between 15 and 25 percent; and private funding between 10 and 20 percent.[9] In other words, combining public funding with parent fees left somewhere between 25 and 50 percent, but typically about one-third, of funding to come from other sources, private grants, and in-kind contributions.

The number of revenue sources, the percentage of revenue deriving from different sources, and year-to-year continuity in amount and sources of revenue, varied widely across programs. The majority of programs in our sample had at least three or four revenue sources, and some as many as eight or nine. When programs had revenue from child care subsidies at all (either contracts or vouchers), these could constitute as little as 10 percent or as much as 90 percent of total revenue. Parent fees, while not varying as widely, provided as little as 5 percent of revenue or as much as 30 percent.

With respect to revenue amounts, though there was an enormous range from program to program—from as little as $500 per child per year to as much as about $3,500—revenues were typically about $1,500 to $2,000 per child per year. That means that revenues fell far short of costs, even when using the more conservative of the two cost figures (i.e., $2,500-$3,000 per child per year). As might be expected, churches, ethnic mutual assistance associations and similar community institutions tended to have the smallest budgets in relation to number of children served.

How did some programs manage to operate with substantially higher costs than revenues? Many made compromises, deferring plans, or dropping one element in favor of another. Some programs simply ran deficits, covered in one way or another by their sponsoring agencies. Some agencies were able to subsidize their after-school programs with funds and resources from more adequately funded programs. Agencies subsidized rent and administrative time. Programs sought out volunteer resources and donations of materials. Less adaptively, programs tried to close a deficit by saving money when, as is not uncommon, there were staff vacancies (although under-staffing bears costs for both staff and children).

With respect to revenue amounts, though there was an enormous range from program to program —from as little as $500 per child per year to as much as about $3,500—revenues were typically about $1,500 to $2,000 per child per year. That means that revenues fell far short of costs.

THE EFFECTS OF MOST

Efforts to Contribute to Supply, Affordability, and Accessibility

In their original proposals, each city committed to creating a certain number of new slots for children in after-school programs (Boston: 1,500 slots; Chicago: 4,000; and Seattle: 2,160). This commitment was really the starting point for a more multifaceted strategy that focused on access to and affordability of existing slots, as well as creation of new ones, and that also addressed issues of information for consumers and public education on the need for after-school programs. Table 1 described a range of strategies used in this domain of MOST, from partially or fully subsidizing new slots in existing programs, to providing funds to make existing slots more affordable, to funding the creation of satellite sites for existing programs, providing grants to allow programs to hire more staff, funding facilities improvements to increase capacity, preparing programs and their staff to be able to serve disabled children (thus increasing access to after-school programs for those children), and collecting information on and addressing transportation-related obstacles to access.

To an increasing extent over time, decisions about how and where to invest in supply-building were made with a strategic eye toward system-building priorities. For example, MOST support for a new program or additional subsidies in schools or the park district would be intended as much to forge a relationship with those organizations as to provide new slots for children. Supply-building strategies were also combined with program improvement efforts. For instance, an effort to fund the start-up of a new program in a historically underserved neighborhood would be linked to technical assistance for a year or more.

Findings

All three cities achieved their numerical goals for slot creation, albeit through different routes. Over time, the relative importance (to the Fund and to the cities) of viewing supply building only in terms of creating slots declined. Boston retained the strongest focus on supply, continuing the historic emphasis of the lead agency on advocacy directed at supply building, as well as issues related to access and affordability. Boston and Seattle continued throughout phase one to view increased public awareness of the need for after-school programs as another important focus of MOST activity.

In each city, MOST directed its supply-building resources equitably, with an emphasis on locating gaps in supply and supporting new slots where the need was greatest. For example, Chicago's main approach to increasing the number of after-school slots in the city was to partner with the Chicago Park District to increase and develop its after-school programming. Chicago MOST's $2,500 expansion grants were given either to increase capacity at sites with stable programs or to facilitate the creation of new programs in neighborhoods not being served by existing programs. Seattle MOST played a particularly useful role in filling in gaps in supply in particular neighborhoods and among particular populations. For instance, it provided $50,000 each for

the start-up of three new programs, two of which were in immigrant neighborhoods with few existing after-school opportunities. The initial funding was supplemented by additional grants and MOST-supported technical assistance. Although this was an expensive way to create new slots and increase access, often requiring ongoing support from MOST staff or MOST-funded technical assistance providers, it was essential to improving access to after-school programs in underserved communities and to bringing new providers (and types of providers) into the field. In the process of identifying underserved communities and helping select new programs, Seattle also involved community representatives, a notable departure from the way human service funds are usually allocated.

Two issues accompanied supply-building efforts in all three cities—the quality of new supply and sustainability. Each city approached these issues differently. Seattle MOST closely linked technical assistance from Schools Out Consortium trainers to its new program grants. Seattle MOST staff also encouraged directors of new programs to develop relationships with each other and with other stakeholders in the field. Chicago MOST sought to arrange for staff training and networking at the new Park District sites it helped subsidize. In order to encourage attention to sustainability, Boston structured its Affordability Grants, designed to subsidize new slots in existing programs, to decrease each year for three years, presumably giving programs time to seek alternative ways of sustaining those slots. In all three cities, agencies in which new programs did not take hold tended to be those in which after-school programming was too marginal or was alien to the agency's mission. In each city, MOST undertook a variety of efforts to address access problems. Boston MOST worked successfully with the schools to have bus routes changed to accommodate children's participation. Seattle MOST and the Seattle Human Services Department undertook a survey to determine families' transportation needs and problems, and disseminated the findings to stakeholders throughout the city. Boston and Seattle MOST undertook efforts to address obstacles faced by disabled children to participation in after-school programs.

Boston MOST was notable for its work to support inclusion of disabled children in after-school programs. It funded subsidized slots specifically for disabled children, and worked with a local organization (Kids of All Learning Abilities) to address staff preparation and adaptations needed in the physical environment of programs involved. (The usefulness of staff preparation work was mitigated, however, by staff turnover.) Seattle MOST's funding of a special needs coordinator/trainer in the local child care resource and referral agency was also notable.

Program Improvement Efforts

The bulk of MOST resources and efforts in each city was directed toward strengthening the quality of after-school programs in low-income communities. Two contextual factors shaped MOST's program improvement efforts in each city. One was prevailing ideas about the attributes of good after-school programs, which gave direction to program improvement efforts. In this case, the NSACA standards served as the framework for guiding program improvement efforts. The second factor was the actual quality of existing programs in each city. As the program observations, discussed earlier, pointed up, the challenges associated with program improvement are enormous. The first phase of MOST provided a foundation for efforts that will have to continue for years.

Two issues accompanied supply-building efforts in all three cities—the quality of new supply and sustainability.

In general, MOST program improvement efforts in each city involved three types of investments:

- *in facilities, equipment, and materials*, and in technical assistance on facilities- and space use-related issues (e.g., help from an architect or space design planner);
- *in individual program staff*, through support for the creation of post-secondary courses, tuition subsidies for such courses, sponsorship of workshops and training events, mentoring, on-site training, development of standards or competencies for

staff (including development of school-age certificates), efforts to develop career lattices or pathways, and less directly, efforts to increase the commitment of higher education institutions to develop courses in this area of service;

- *in programs as a whole*, through support for structured self-assessment using the NSACA standards, support for general technical assistance or technical assistance on particular issues (e.g., inclusion, classroom design), "model" program grants, grants to start new activities, linkage to curricular resource organizations (e.g., in arts, sports, culture), linkage to organizations that provide volunteers, development of resource libraries, creation of mutual support networks among after-school programs, and support for collaborative efforts between programs.[10]

MOST (and matching) funds for facilities, equipment, and materials improvements were usually distributed through an RFP process, with proposals reviewed and evaluated by either the MOST standing committees, MOST staff, or volunteers. In general, MOST-sponsored (or in some cases co-sponsored) workshops and training events were open to the whole after-school program community. MOST-subsidized technical assistance to programs was distributed in a variety of ways. In some cases, it was linked to other MOST investments, such as program start-up grants or facilities grants. In some cases, it was distributed competitively, through an RFP process. MOST directly funded curricular resource organizations to work with after-school programs, or in a few cases had those organizations manage their own RFP process. It also helped resource organizations develop plans for their own outreach programs. For instance, MOST-sponsored workshops and program network meetings were used as forums for resource organizations to come and present. Finally, some small MOST grants in each city were intended to support such discrete activities as a choir or a photography club, or the purchase of new science materials.

Across the three cities, approximately 400 program improvement grants were awarded over the course of phase one. (Nearly half those grants were small, ranging in amounts from $500 to $1,000.) Grants went to almost the full range of larger providers listed in Tables 2a, 2b, and 2c, and to scores of small providers, including churches, ethnic mutual assistance associations, community centers, and public housing developments.

Findings

(1) General Findings

The wide-ranging nature of program improvement strategies implemented by MOST in the three different cities illustrates both the multifaceted nature and the difficulty of program improvement. Some of the specific approaches used within MOST—for example, structured self-assessment leading to accreditation, facilities improvement grants, various kinds of training workshops—had precedents within the worlds of early childhood care and education, youth services and related fields. Some strategies had fewer precedents, and were, in part, exploratory efforts or experiments. Boston experimented with Model Program Grants; Seattle implemented an innovative Mentor Project; and Chicago developed its Connecting Communities and Friendship Circles projects on the basis of a relatively new concept pioneered by the Chicago Children's Coalition. No one knew the best way to implement these strategies at the beginning of the MOST Initiative, and after three years, the cities were still learning about how to improve the resources and quality of programs. More fundamentally, there were no precedents for city-wide efforts to orchestrate a range of strategies, and involve a range of organizations, to improve the quality of a variety of school-age programs.

As with efforts to contribute to supply, it proved sensible to address program improvement at the city level. A local program, even a program with a resourceful coordinator, might not have a broad enough perspective on resources it could tap. It took a city-wide lens to identify systemic problems, and to see all the pieces at once—programs needing resources, resource organizations needing programs—and consider how particular pieces might be put together. Program directors and staff appreciated the very fact that there was a city-wide organization devoted

to after-school issues. MOST efforts to strengthen programs were sometimes useful in awakening the consciousness of large organizations to particular issues. For instance, Chicago MOST's efforts to enlist the Illinois Facilities Fund in its work led to creation of a manual on facilities improvement strategies for after-school programs.

Participants in MOST program improvement efforts were enthusiastic about the financial support they received, almost regardless of its size and purpose. Even modest resources, for instance a grant of $500 to $1,000, were seen as helpful to programs starved for them. MOST was praised for recognizing and reaching out to small, "nontraditional" providers—such as libraries, churches, and mutual assistance associations, and for working with programs whatever their level of sophistication, rather than trying to impose unrealistic standards or expectations.

The complementary processes of applying for and then managing MOST grants themselves proved useful to programs. A surprising number had never applied for grants before, and preparing and submitting applications often led, for the first time, to reflection and discussions among staff about the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of their program, and where they wanted to take it. Similarly, once a grant was made, considering what to focus on with a technical assistance provider, or the specific training needs of staff, led to kinds of self-reflection in which many program directors and staff had never previously engaged.

With limited resources, MOST faced the challenge of finding an appropriate balance between depth and breadth in its program improvement investments. Breadth was important in order to establish relationships with a wide range of organizations, and to build the credibility of MOST as a city-wide effort. Depth was needed in order to try to create a meaningful impact on individual programs, and to build a base of activity in underserved neighborhoods. MOST also had to deal with the fact that the same programs tended to apply for numerous grants. It used outreach to pull smaller programs, as well as those in underserved neighborhoods, into the application process. Although outreach helped, the distribution of grants remained unequal. A handful of programs in each city benefited from numerous MOST grants, while a much larger group received one or two. Other groups' participation was limited to staff member attendance at a workshop. A still larger group of programs did not participate directly in MOST.

In general, stronger, healthier, and more stable programs were better able to use and benefit from program improvement supports than smaller, more fragile programs. Small providers often were operating at or slightly above a survival level. For instance, implementing the ASQ's structured self-assessment approach proved most difficult for those programs that needed it the most—because of the instability and lack of continuity, planning, and money that most programs live with. (This generalization did not apply as clearly to facilities, equipment, and materials grants.)

With limited resources, MOST faced the challenge of finding an appropriate balance between depth and breadth in its program improvement investments.

(2) Effects of Facilities, Equipment, and Materials Grants

Of the three types of investments, those in facilities, equipment, and materials tended to have the clearest, most immediate benefits. Although facilities grants did not change the basic character of a program, such seemingly simple improvements as air conditioning or better lighting or the creation of a studio area in a room sometimes made a big difference in the morale of staff and children. Small changes could have measurable effects. A supervisor of YMCA school-age programs offered the example of new area rugs, that were used to give better definition to certain spaces. Moreover, facilities grants were used to leverage corollary program improvements. For instance, a program at a public housing site was able to use a $20,000 facilities grant from MOST to leverage another $59,000 grant for facilities improvements from the city's public housing authority. Facilities grants were sometimes used to build relationships with

major public agencies, notably school systems and park districts.

Tying facilities grants to technical assistance in space design and use was beneficial. Programs that had support from MOST-funded space consultants uniformly perceived them to be helpful. One space design consultant noted that "What I'm trying to do with people is change their way of viewing children, of how they work with children, and how they perceive children's ability to work independently and productively." This designer pointed out that matters as simple as where materials are placed and how they are grouped can contribute to choice, and to self-directed, sustained activity. In fact, programs needed assistance not just in use of space, but in deployment of learning and enrichment materials.

Although we heard occasional comments about "professionalizing" or "upgrading" the frontline workforce, MOST (realistically) focused on strategies that would be helpful for the workforce as it was constituted.

(3) Effects of Investment in Staff Development

In general, MOST investment in individual staff had quite modest effects on the quality of after-school programs. It is not surprising that educational and training experiences might have a more direct (and often cumulative) effect on the individuals who participate in them than on the work settings from which they come. In the after-school field, this pattern is reinforced by the nature of the workforce and high rates of staff turnover. As an instructor at Seattle Central Community College commented, "We'll get people excited in the classes, and then half disappear or they're off to another job. We've probably had a quarter of students finish all their classes."

In light of this pattern, it is helpful to consider coordinators/directors and frontline staff separately. The former are more likely to be professional—most coordinators have bachelor's degrees (and a few master's degrees); many have majored in fields or taken course work directly relevant to after-school programs (e.g., early childhood education); and many are committed to the field as a career. Relatively speaking, focusing on program coordinators and directors had a larger, more predictable, and more enduring pay-off than focusing on frontline staff. Directors are the glue that give the field at least a measure of continuity. Moreover, directors were in a stronger position than frontline staff to shape their programs as a whole in terms of approach, schedule, choice of activities, room arrangement, and so forth. (On the other hand, a few directors reported that it was difficult to transfer what they had learned about appropriate ways to interact with children to their staff.) Directors also demonstrated relatively greater interest in available courses.

Although we heard occasional comments about "professionalizing" or "upgrading" the frontline workforce, MOST (realistically) focused on strategies that would be helpful for the workforce as it was constituted—through sponsorship of workshops, subsidizing postsecondary classes, and occasional support for on-site training. Training and education for frontline staff seemed most effective when it concentrated on a few basic messages. As the coordinator of the Chicago's Park Kids program noted, "We had standards [to introduce to staff but we had to] cut back on them; it was a little over the heads of the staff . . . we need to keep working on basic issues."

Training: The primary training vehicle in the after-school field is the one- or two-day training event, such as a conference or workshop. Participation in a workshop often brought shifts in participants' awareness and knowledge of a particular issue, for instance room arrangement, snacks, design and organization of particular activity areas, scheduling, flexibility and individualization, group management, or responding to difficult behavior. Even the most basic information about after-school programming was often perceived as new and very helpful by both staff and coordinators. (One example cited to us was the seemingly obvious idea that older children need more voice and control over their activities.) Workshops were reported to be motivating, giving staff a "shot in the arm." They sometimes strengthened participants'

sense of identity as after-school providers and facilitated interactions with other providers. However, workshops—not surprisingly—did not usually lead to basic changes (e.g., in schedule, activities, approach, or in how staff related to children) in the programs from which participants were drawn. For such changes to have occurred, supervisors would have needed to follow up, helping staff process what was presented and encouraging them to integrate new ideas into their work over time. This rarely occurred in the programs we studied, whether because supervisors were not aware of the specific content of a workshop, were too busy, or simply were not aware of the need for follow-up.

College-Level Courses: Participation in a college class or course sequence also tended to be a self-contained experience. Participants noted that, although they learned things to improve their programs, they could not often implement them, due to lack of a mandate to do so, unreceptive supervisors, lack of resources, or other factors. Some course participants were not ready to take advantage of what classes had to offer. High turnover undoubtedly also limited the benefits of college classes (as well as that of other kinds of training).

After-school program staff in the MOST cities were reluctant to pursue postsecondary courses in this field, and only about 25 percent of those frontline staff in all three cities who participated in postsecondary course sequences completed the locally defined sequence of courses (anywhere from two to six courses). Of 44 participants in Boston's Apex program, 13 completed the full sequence; of 110 staff who took any courses in Chicago, 26 took more than one course; of 138 who took any courses in Seattle, 26 took more than one course. Program staff saw little financial gain to taking courses, given the low wages in the field and the lack of any career path to higher wages. (Staff in most programs received no salary increments for courses taken, and they were usually not paid for any hours spent in class.) Some staff lacked time to take courses because they were already students or holding other part-time jobs, or lacked interest because they only planned to be in the field for a few years, or lacked confidence in their academic skills. At a practical level, it was difficult to schedule courses. Programs had no open times for staff, no replacements for them, and staff had other jobs or school during nonprogram hours. Staff did not want to attend classes on Saturdays if they conflicted with family responsibilities. Moreover, some staff could not afford to pay tuition at the beginning of a course and then wait for reimbursement after the course was over—a procedure common to agencies that subsidize professional development.

There were some attempts to overcome these constraints. Seattle Central Community College succeeded in bringing after-school workers into the community college system in stages by starting with neighborhood classes. A handful of agencies in Chicago paid tuition fees themselves, and then collected the post-course reimbursement from MOST. This approach not only addressed the problem of staff's lack of resources, it involved agency directors and administrators in promoting staff training, and made staff accountable for completing course work. Clearly though, just as with connecting providers with external resources or facilitating mentor-mentee relationships, it takes extra effort to help frontline staff take advantage of college classes and other professional development opportunities.

With respect to efforts to expand the supply of courses and credentialing programs to prepare people for work in after-school programs, MOST's efforts to involve the higher education community had at best mixed success. The Child and Family Studies certificate program at Seattle C tral Community College was an unusual example of commitment to this program area. Individual colleges and state boards that oversee higher education remain reluctant to commit to this specialty area until they see clearer demand from current and prospective after-school workers and evidence of a distinct profession emerging, and until it becomes clearer what knowledge and skills are essential to this work.[11] One faculty member from a Boston college that has started new human service and child development programs in the past told us that she sees ". . . no demand at all for a four-year school-age care degree program." Another noted that, "We have too

many start-ups here with innovative plans and then no students show up."

(4) Effects of Investments in Programs as a Whole

In general, the strategies encompassed by this category—promulgation of standards, structured self-assessment, technical assistance, and linking programs to external resources—were somewhat more effective at bringing about program improvement than those directed at individual staff. And of these, linking programs to external resources, particularly curricular resources, was relatively more effective than others. In addition, investment in "programs as a whole" often meant investment in resource and support organizations, strengthening this critical dimension of the after-school field.

Promulgation of Standards: Although linked to structured self-assessment (discussed below), this was not a prominent MOST strategy. MOST staff publicized and discussed the NSACA standards at training workshops and in other venues, and MOST-funded technical assistance providers sometimes used them in their work. The evaluation team found in interviews that a majority of after-school providers (particular program directors and coordinators) were mindful of the standards, partly due to MOST's efforts. At the same time, MOST in each city faced a dilemma with respect to standards. During phase one, large organizations in each city were in various stages of developing their own standards, in some cases perceiving themselves as unique, in some wishing to maintain control, in still others viewing the NSACA standards as unrealistic. MOST staff and consultants tried to encourage such organizations to build on the NSACA standards, and in Chicago this led to incorporation of parts of the standards into the agency-specific standards of two large providers (a park district and a youth-serving organization).

Structured Self-Assessment Linked to Standards and Eventual Accreditation: This program improvement strategy, described in detail in the full report, had a number of distinct strengths and limitations. It compelled self-reflection and observation and encouraged programs to set priorities. It created a variety of mechanisms for feedback (especially from parents, who are rarely heard from). The fact that a particular set of quality standards guided the process was very helpful to program staff, who had never had to consider their actions and activities, nor the program as a whole, in that light. The standards also gave leverage to programs within their host agencies to seek resources and supports for program improvement.

There was, at the same time, a readiness factor operating: The self-assessment process is very time- and energy-consuming, adding one more pressure to program staff who already feel various time pressures. Many after-school programs, barely able to keep themselves fully staffed week-in and week-out, simply did not have the extra energy required by the self-assessment process. Structured self-assessment processes also took time—to move through the stages from team building to data gathering and analysis, improvement plan development, and implementation. The staffing instability characteristic of after-school programs sometimes undermined the continuity needed to make the process work within the necessary two-year (or longer) time frame. Finally, where the process revealed problems, it was not always within a program's power to address them.

Technical Assistance to Programs: Technical assistance supported by MOST took two principal forms—long-term technical assistance (often for a year or more) focused on general program improvement, and short-term technical assistance (anywhere from one to eight or nine contacts) focused on particular program issues or aspects. Both tended to be provided by either experienced providers, working on a contractual basis for the MOST lead agency or a resource organization, or directly by the staff of a particular resource organization (such as the School's Out Consortium in Seattle). Long-term technical assistance to individual programs was on its surface a useful program improvement strategy. It afforded the individual providing assistance time to come to understand the distinct support needs of a program and its staff. It afforded time to build relationships and gain trust, which increased the likelihood that guidance, advice and feedback would be heard and utilized. As one technical assistance

provider noted, "Until you develop a relationship with the staff, no training will actually happen." Long-term technical assistance also allowed time for assistance to be tailored.

The effectiveness of long-term technical assistance was nonetheless constrained to differing degrees in each city by a variety of factors. One was lack of "supply" and "demand." Except perhaps in Seattle, there were too few people with the skills and experience to provide such assistance. (In searching for people to provide long-term technical assistance, it may be that sponsors in most cities will have to look more broadly than they are accustomed to, perhaps to the public schools, the early childhood community, even the social service community.) At the same time, many programs did not have or would not commit the internal resources needed to use technical assistance effectively, including involving program staff in setting priorities, scheduling, and deciding with whom a technical assistance provider would work. Staff often lacked the time and energy; agency administrators lacked interest or commitment; or a program was in a day-to-day, week-to-week mode of operation.

More focused technical assistance (which overlapped with the staff training and the strategy of linking programs to external resources) tended to be easier for many programs to manage and assimilate. Examples included space planning (discussed above), examination and refinement of a program's schedule, better use of field trips, creation of a literacy center, and work to strengthen art activities. Focused technical assistance was usually time-limited and fit more easily into pre-defined time slots in which staff were available, for example at staff meetings or monthly in-service training sessions. At the same time, its more discrete demands and nature led to discrete effects.

MOST staff and committees found it difficult to decide which programs should receive limited technical assistance resources. Should they be relatively stronger ones that could take greater advantage of technical assistance, or weaker ones with a greater absolute need? New programs struggling to become viable or established ones that had demonstrated viability? Programs receiving a lot of other MOST attention or those receiving less or no attention from MOST in other domains (such as supply-building)? As in other domains of program improvement, MOST tended to seek a balance.

Linking Programs to External Resources: This strategy encompassed a variety of kinds of linkages, in different directions—program directors to each other, program staff to each other (often through contacts made at workshops), programs to each other, programs to organizations offering specialists or volunteers, or to curricular resource organizations (and vice versa, i.e., resource organizations to programs). The linkages facilitated by MOST enriched, extended and supported programs (and their staff) in a variety of ways. They provided children with new experiences. They brought additional adults into programs to teach, support, and tutor children. Linkages reduced the isolation that characterized many programs. They sometimes provided staff opportunities to gain knowledge and skills in particular curricular areas.

Yet programs were not always able to use the new resources afforded through linkages effectively. As with other forms of program improvement support, some programs were operating at too low a level; they were barely able to provide day-to-day care for the children they served. Moreover, it takes a great deal of time and effort to make a linkage work effectively. A number of respondents told us that, while their new relationships and partnerships were worthwhile, they carried costs, whether in terms of energy and resources needed to sustain the new relationships or loss of control. They learned that it took resources to effectively use new resources. As a program director noted, "You've got to give up something to get something."

Boston MOST was particularly attentive to the task of helping link programs to organizations that provided *volunteers*—especially college students, but also AmeriCorps volunteers—for tutoring, reading, and so forth. This clearly enriched programs and increased individual attention to children. Yet, effective use of volunteers required more care and attention than anticipated. Volunteers' schedules did not always match programs' needs, and volun-

teers did not have the skills to help children with more serious reading problems.

Introducing *new curricular elements and activities* had a variety of benefits. It sometimes served to add a measure of discipline or self-reflection to a program, leading staff to reflect on their larger goals, schedule, program content, or classroom organization, or leading a coordinator or director to ask how other external resources might play a role. In turn, staff of resource organizations, such as arts organizations and museums, reported that their involvement in MOST helped them learn about working in communities and with community-based agencies. A few such organizations had had an outreach mission but lacked the strategy to implement it, and/or lacked ties to the after-school program world. For instance, a staff person from the Boston Museum of Science noted that involvement with MOST had led the museum to look at communities differently.

The different approaches to bringing specialists and specialized resources from other organizations to work in programs had different patterns of effects. One approach brought teachers of the arts or museum staff in for a specified period of time during the year—typically once or twice a week for four to six weeks. This certainly exposed children to a particular activity or resource for a brief period of time, but often had little lasting effect for the program. (It was usually not clear what further opportunities were available to a child who became interested in a particular specialized activity.) A second approach was for specialists to come in to work with program staff to infuse a new element into a program. This had residual effects, but also left program staff responsible for conducting an activity requiring some specialized skills and knowledge. A third was to have a specialist come in once or twice a week throughout the year, for instance, to teach a dance class or karate. This sometimes worked very well, sometimes not, depending on the individual and how hard staff worked to support him or her.

In general, linking programs to curricular resources was more complicated than imagined, especially with arts activities. Programs discovered that it takes careful planning and attention to logistics, as well as the active support of existing staff, to make a new activity involving specialists work well. Too often a specialist, such as an artist, is simply thrown into a program and expected to find his or her way. In Boston, artists linked to some Boston Community Centers in their summer program found their classes scheduled at the same time as other camp activities, staff unaware of and unprepared for them, and other problems. In one Chicago-based initiative designed to bring arts into school-based after-school programs, artists complained of lack of space, disorganized host agencies who would arbitrarily schedule other activities at the same times, children being pulled out, and no one making sure children showed up. On the other hand, some specialists do not have skills to work with groups of children, and may not understand children's behavior.

Further Findings

Observations of MOST's diverse program improvement efforts, and conversations with MOST stakeholders about these efforts, led to a number of general thoughts that may have a bearing on future program improvement efforts in the field. One such insight was that expertise and experience in the after-school field are distributed unevenly and in some respects "bimodally." There are a handful of very good people, committed to the field; and there are a large number of largely unqualified people (doing the best they can), many of whom will work in the field for no more than a few years. There are generally too few people in the middle of this distribution. To build the size of the middle group, closer attention has to be paid to why directors leave. Anecdotal evidence from MOST suggests a combination of new opportunities (i.e., receiving a promotion), lack of recognition within their sponsoring agencies, and burnout due to impossible workload demands, program understaffing, and failure to manage demands and time well. (In some instances, a site director may have early childhood programs as well as after-school programs to monitor.)

Observations and conversations with MOST stakeholders also suggested that coordinators/directors need education and

support in acquiring management skills, program design and development skills, and child development knowledge. They also need to learn how to serve as on-site technical assistance "advisors" or "clinical" supervisors to their classroom staff, observing and providing individualized feedback on a regular basis. Very little supervision of that sort occurs in the after-school field, for varied reasons.

Finally, MOST illuminated how challenging it is to undertake program improvement, and how many factors affect it—lack of resources, staff turnover, organizational receptivity, different organizational motives, limited capacity to use assistance, and the need for a long-term time horizon. The MOST experience also serves as a reminder that progress in program improvement is not linear. Setbacks will occur; some changes achieved are fragile and easily reversible. Programs have a certain center of gravity, which is not easy to shift without—and sometimes even with—sizable, sustained investment. MOST reminded us—if indeed we need such reminding—that strengthening programs requires a patient, long-term, multifaceted, adequately funded and coordinated approach.

MOST AS A SYSTEM-BUILDING INITIATIVE

Beyond—and through—their efforts to build supply, increase the accessibility of programs and improve program quality, MOST staff and collaborators worked in a variety of ways to strengthen after-school programs as a city-level system. But what is a city-level after-school system, and what are indicators of a relatively effective or well-functioning system? The after-school system is in part the variety of organizations that have something to do with after-school programming in any city: providers (including those that provide facilities), resource and support organizations (i.e., those that provide professional development and training, technical assistance, curricular resources, information and referral, etc.), licensing and regulatory agencies, and funders. And it is in part how, and how well, these organizations work together—how well they communicate, collaborate, and so forth. These two dimensions can be distinguished as the *constituent elements* of the system and the *working relationships* among those elements. In some cases, these relationships are mandated, in others they are voluntary. Some relationships are stable, others are much more fluid.

The after-school system can be further characterized by how well stakeholders work together *to serve some set of objectives*. The basic idea underlying MOST's efforts in each city was to create opportunities, reasons, and mechanisms for the variety of organizations with a stake in the after-school field—both organizations doing the same thing but isolated from each other, and those with distinct but overlapping interests and goals—to work together more effectively to address issues of supply, access, affordability, and quality. Thus, if MOST were to contribute to a more effective or better functioning system, one might expect to see better communication, coordination and cooperation among stakeholders, better planning, greater efficiency and equity in distribution of resources (financial and other kinds), and more linkages and working partnerships, *all in the service of MOST objectives*. More subtly, one would expect to see greater awareness of the heterogeneity of the after-school system, a (complementary) sense among stakeholders that they were part of a common enterprise, working toward the same ends, and, more generally, people more likely to think in systems terms.

Observations and conversations with MOST stakeholders also suggested that coordinators/directors need education and support in acquiring management skills, program design and development skills, and child development knowledge.

In some respects, all the various strategies and efforts described here can be seen as system-building strategies in that they expanded the size of the system, strengthened organizations' ability to do their customary work (we call that "strengthening organizations in place") or strengthened relationships among organizations, and were undertaken strategically—with an eye to the larger picture. In that sense, the sys-

tem-building effects of other kinds of MOST activities were not incidental. System-building nonetheless embodied distinct activities as well. Table 1 described four general categories of such activities: governance and leadership development; linkage strategies; leveraging strategies (i.e., efforts to shape or alter the behavior of key stakeholders such as schools or park districts, or to use MOST resources as a lever to bring other resources into the field); and advocacy and public awareness.

A unique characteristic of MOST in all three cities was the development of a set of collaborative structures: some kind of governance or oversight group and some number of domain-specific working groups or committees, corresponding to the substantive goals of MOST. The former groups tended to be responsible for reviewing and refining the original strategic plans, identifying emergent needs, and setting priorities each year. The latter, typically led by one or more members of the oversight group, were responsible for planning in their respective areas (e.g., supply building or program improvement or professional development) and in some cases deciding about distribution of funds. Both types of groups worked to link the fragmented resources and elements of the after-school program system together. Membership in both was voluntary; composition and tenure varied from city to city. In some instances, MOST lead agency personnel also "staffed" the committees formed.

A unique characteristic of MOST in all three cities was the development of a set of collaborative structures: some kind of governance or oversight group and some number of domain-specific working groups or committees, corresponding to the substantive goals of MOST.

Effects of MOST System-Building Efforts

MOST was the first after-school initiative in the country to take a systems perspective on strengthening after-school programs. Thus the meaning of "system" and tasks of system building had to emerge in part through an inductive process. Participants recognized the potential of greater collaboration among stakeholders. But it was by no means clear at the outset what the end result of system-strengthening efforts would be. It was not even clear who was part of the after-school system. There was also some tension about what the focus of system-building activity should be. Throughout the first phase of MOST, the cities struggled to balance their commitment to a broad collaborative process that engaged a variety of stakeholders, and thereby pulled in a variety priorities and perspectives, with the fact that MOST had its own priorities, and was accountable to the funder for achieving objectives laid out in the action plans.

MOST system-building efforts coincided with a period of fairly rapid change and evolution in the after-school field. New federal and state funding was becoming available, most of it tied to school systems and academic goals. After-school programs were receiving growing public and political attention. Large youth-serving organizations were rethinking how and why they wanted to serve children during nonschool hours. Local funders (such as Seattle's United Way) were revising their priorities and funding approaches. Larger secular developments created unexpected opportunities. For instance, new city-level initiatives, particularly those emanating from the mayors' offices, created opportunities to share hard-won experience and lessons about building supply, strengthening access, and improving programs. Yet external events could also complicate MOST efforts, for example, changes in Chicago's child care subsidy system, which led to dramatically higher parental copayments, making after-school care even less affordable for some families.

With respect to effects of MOST system-building efforts, MOST clearly made a contribution to the coherence and "working effectiveness" of after-school programs as a system in each city. With its broad perspective and mandate, MOST looked across the whole city and found opportunities to link stakeholders with complementary strengths and needs. Over time, MOST efforts yielded scores of new working relationships, collaborations, and networks.

Those interviewed by Chapin Hall noted that MOST had broadened their sense of what the after-school system was about, increased their awareness of other stakeholders, or simply increased their basic awareness that this field of services existed to serve children. A number of those interviewed noted that MOST provided the concrete rationale, structures, and resources to carry out intentions to be more collaborative. A number appreciated the fact that there was finally a city-wide organization devoted to after-school issues.

Planning for MOST brought local leaders and representatives of different segments of the system together on a sustained basis. MOST's governance groups and working committees created new venues for decision making around after-school issues. The regularity and long tenure of these groups and committees allowed for the gradual building of relationships and mutual understanding. The debates within MOST committees about whom to target and fund gradually broadened stakeholders' perspectives on who belonged in the after-school field. The committees created new leadership opportunities, and clearly contributed to more dialogue, improved communication, better planning, and more equitable distribution of resources, within the purview of what resources MOST controlled. MOST also created other venues for discussion, communication, and information sharing, such as regular directors' roundtables. Participation in MOST helped some stakeholders feel less isolated in their work, and others become more aware of the service and support needs of particular groups of children or particular communities.

MOST leadership development efforts tended to be shaped by the context of each city. In Boston, Parents United for Child Care had to work especially hard to broaden the base of leadership in the after-school community. In Chicago, a strong, informal leadership group from the private, nonprofit sector worked hard to establish relationships with two major public providers—the park district and the public schools. In Seattle, where key figures from the public and private sectors already worked together closely, concerns centered around increasing the involvement of underserved and underrepresented communities in decision making about after-school resources. Seattle MOST strove to give underserved communities a voice in after-school system governance in part by including representatives of these communities in its principle governance body, the Community Oversight Group.

Generally, the three years allotted to the first phase of MOST was only enough time to begin the long-term tasks of system building. For instance, some major providers and key resource and support organizations in each city remained at the margins of the initiative, for different reasons. Getting large public (and to a lesser extent private) organizations to see themselves as part of an external enterprise proved a slow process. Large providers often had an "inward" focus, acting by their own distinct logic, and tending to view themselves as unique. MOST also developed varying relationships with resource and support organizations—some excellent, some more tension-filled. MOST was in some respects a new resource and support organization itself, and this led to a degree of wariness among some existing organizations, such as Child Care Resource and Referral agencies. One specific source of confusion was whether MOST was a direct provider of support—whether, for example, it did training and/or professional development, whether it served as a resource center for curriculum materials—or whether it was a facilitator of such activities. The answer was that MOST played both kinds of roles.

MOST clearly made a contribution to the coherence and "working effectiveness" of after-school programs as a system in each city.

CONCLUSIONS

This final report reconfirms the conclusion of an interim report that MOST is a practical initiative. Yet MOST is not *just* a practical initiative. It has proven helpful to those involved in policy development efforts in the three MOST cities. For example, MOST staff have been able to provide solid information to public sector decision makers at critical points in the development of

new plans and initiatives. MOST supply-building and program improvement strategies can be read as a blueprint for what it takes to tackle these critical areas. The conception of after-school programs as a city-level system was in many respects a breakthrough for the field. MOST raised the consciousness of stakeholders in each city with respect to what an after-school system could be. MOST has demonstrated the value of strategic thinking, and helped clarify the resources needed and strategies that might be used in strengthening after-school programs as systems. Its general framework has served as an exemplar for other city- and state-level initiatives. MOST has also illuminated the core issues facing the after-school field.

The final report describes a long list of concrete accomplishments. There are new after-school slots for low-income children, many of which are subsidized; new programs in underserved neighborhoods; and, selectively, greater capacity to serve disabled children. Program space has been reconfigured. Coordinators and directors have had training and educational experiences that changed the way they looked at their programs. Technical assistance providers have nudged programs in new directions. There are more relationships among stakeholders in the field in each city, and stakeholders are generally more aware of each other. Programs have been hooked up with arts organizations, museums and cultural organizations. As a result of MOST, scores of children in each city had access to enriching experiences that they otherwise probably would not have had.

The conception of after-school programs as a city-level system was in many respects a breakthrough for the field.

The linkages facilitated by MOST enriched, extended, and supported programs in many ways, and reduced the isolation that characterized many programs. MOST itself became a collaborative effort, securing the allegiance and active involvement of program directors, parents, trainers and educators, community leaders, and funders in its committees and working groups. As a volunteer member of one of the MOST working groups in Chicago told us, "[The city has] gotten a lot of mileage out of the money we've received from DeWitt Wallace [Reader's Digest Fund], and it's due to the dedicated core of volunteers in the network." MOST fostered dialogue and discussion among stakeholders in the after-school field about a wide range of issues, something all too rare in the human services.

MOST demonstrated that it is possible to strive simultaneously for more efficient, effective, and equitable use of resources, but that doing so is particularly difficult in a resource-starved field. There were two key challenges here. The first, alluded to earlier, was to find an appropriate balance between depth—making sizable, sustained investments in particular programs, provider organizations, or resource organizations—and breadth in its program improvement investments. In some cases this meant distributing resources widely (rather than deeply), in others making sure that resources reached underserved neighborhoods as well as resource-rich ones, and fragile agencies as well as stronger ones. The second was to find the right balance among grants and investments most likely to offer a strategic pay-off, those most likely to endure, and those that would be immediately helpful but perhaps less strategic or likely to endure.[12] A more strategic investment might allow MOST to leverage some larger set of funds or activity, or serve as an incentive to involve an important public institution with MOST. Yet MOST staff also recognized that funds sometimes had to be used by programs to meet pressing needs. For instance, a program expansion or improvement grant might be used to plug a sudden financial hole, or allow a program to avoid having to raise its fees. Such substitution was inevitable in a resource-starved field.

Another central challenge faced by MOST staff and collaborators was balancing the demands of overseeing MOST's multiple strategies and managing its many specific grants and activities, and finding time to think, sort out what MOST's appropriate role should be, and how the work should be done. By the third year of phase one all three cities were becoming more

strategic in their own ways, and less preoccupied with the minutiae of implementation. They recognized the need to set priorities among the many activities that MOST had promised in its early plans and initiated during the first two years. They balanced the difficult task of attending to plans while simultaneously responding to unexpected opportunities and events. And, especially by the third year of phase one, MOST staff and collaborators in each city had become aware of the need to take advantage as best they could of changes set in motion by other actors and forces.

MOST efforts in each of the three main domains yielded not only a variety of benefits, but hard-won lessons. For example, MOST demonstrated that it is one thing to develop new supply, and another to assure that this supply is accessible, equitably distributed, affordable, of decent quality, and sustainable. Supply building is a multifaceted task, requiring a multifaceted approach. Although funds and funding, particularly public funding, are at the heart of the task, other activities (which may or may not require significant funding), such as working on transportation and inclusion, improving facilities, and building technical assistance capacity, are also important.

The work of MOST in the three cities pointed up the program quality problems characteristic of this field, and reminded us—if indeed we need such reminding—that strengthening programs too requires a patient, long-term, multifaceted, adequately funded and coordinated approach. Each discrete program improvement strategy and activity was modestly helpful, but none by itself was powerful enough to leverage basic changes in program quality. The MOST experience raised particular questions about the conventional view that quality can be improved by strengthening the skills of the after-school workforce. At the same time, it demonstrated that although there are many potential external resources available to after-school programs—curricular resources such as arts and cultural organizations, and volunteer resources—effectively linking programs to new resources requires hard work. Many programs either are not aware of and/or do not know how to seek out external resources, and few realize how much work it takes to effectively incorporate curricular or volunteer resources, or have the extra energy needed to do so. The organizations that provide resources themselves do not necessarily grasp what is required for their resources to be used effectively.

In the end, it should be noted again that the work described in this report is continuing. All three cities have received additional grant support from the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds to carry on with the enormous tasks of strengthening programs and system-building. As part of the latter, they are focusing attention on reforming the fragmented and incoherent way in which after-school programs are financed. The MOST Initiative has become a respected voice in the local after-school system in each city. Many of those involved at the outset are still involved, in part because the tasks are difficult, but also, we think, because they respect the way MOST has gone about its work.

The work of MOST... pointed up the program quality problems characteristic of this field, and reminded us... that strengthening programs too requires a patient, long-term, multifaceted, adequately funded and coordinated approach.

ENDNOTES

1 The full report is available for purchase from Chapin Hall Center for Children.

2 Formerly known as the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund.

3 The National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) at the Wellesley College Center for Research on Women played an instrumental role in designing the MOST Initiative and provides ongoing technical assistance to the three cities.

4 After-school programs are center- or agency-based services that provide some combination of care and protection, enrichment, academic support, and opportunity for free play to children ages 5 to 14, on a regular basis (at least two or three, but typically five days, per week). Most after-school programs share a common activity structure—some homework time, arts and crafts and table games, physical activity, expressive arts and/or cultural activity, perhaps some tutoring, reading time, and science activity. Many programs also provide full-day care during school holidays and the summer months.

5 The ASQ (Assessing School-Age Quality) pilot was an early MOST activity, described in an Appendix of the full final report. It involved the testing and subsequent refinement of a structured self-assessment approach to program improvement, tied to a defined quality framework and an accreditation system sponsored by the National School-Age Care Alliance.

6 Sources included the NSACA accreditation standards alluded to in the footnote above; Halpern, R. (1991). The role of after-school programs in the lives of inner-city children. Chicago: Chapin Hall Center for Children; Rosenthal, R. & Vandell, D. (1996). Quality of care at school-aged child care programs: Regulatable features, observed experiences, child perspectives and parent perspectives. *Child Development, 67*, (2), 434-2,445; and Vandell, D., Shumow, L., & Posner, J. (1997). Children's after-school programs: Promoting resiliency or vulnerability. In H. McCubbin, et al. (Eds.), *Promoting resiliency in families and children at risk: Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications.

7 Staff generally do not have to have a particular educational background or to be certified (although some staff, e.g., group workers and head teachers, in some programs fall loosely under state or local child care licensing requirements, which may require a modest number of hours of post-secondary credits).

8 The various budgets reviewed were structured very differently, and included different kinds of information and line items. In many cases, a variety of inferences had to be made about the meaning of particular figures, especially in trying to distinguish between cost and expenditure. It was not always clear whether a budget covered full-days during school holidays and whether it included programming during summer months. Most of the budgets provided reasonably good information on salaries and benefits, rent and utilities, food, transportation, supplies and equipment, sometimes insurance. Some accounted for in-kind (i.e., non-monetary) contributions of rent and utilities, agency administrative time and volunteers, others did not.

9 Although parent fees constitute the main source of revenue for after-school programs serving more advantaged children, they are only a modest source for programs serving low-income children. When parent fees are charged, there is invariably a sliding scale. Minimum fees may be as little as a few dollars a week, maximum fees the so-called "market rate" for a program. Fee schedules are sometimes adhered to closely, sometimes used flexibly. The fee scale of a typical program might be $20/week for families earning less than $10,000 a year; $25/week for those earning $10,000-$15,000; $30/week for those earning $15,000-$20,000. In practice, half the participating families in such a program would probably pay $15/week or less.

10 Some program improvement activities obviously encompassed more than one strategy and affected more than one dimension of program quality. For instance, an effort to infuse arts into a program would include training for individual staff. A MOST-sponsored conference or workshop might focus a session on facilities-related issues. On-site training for staff sometimes included a focus on a program as a whole—its schedule, curriculum, or facilities. Facilities grants affected not just the quality of the physical environment but frequently the quality of activities.

11 There are, nonetheless, small signs of progress. During the summer of 1999, the Illinois Community College Board approved a school-age care specialization.

12 Even grants that were made for short-term projects were worthwhile on their own terms—for instance, the six-week photography course funded by MOST in a Chicago program. That course created a new relationship with a board member who shared his knowledge with children and staff. The course also may have sparked a child's interest or helped to develop new skills in photography. Additionally, it may have contributed to children's confidence and competence in managing the photography project that was the culmination of the course.

Authors

Robert Halpern is a Professor at the Erikson Institute for Graduate Study in Child Development in Chicago and a Faculty Associate at Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. He is the author of *Fragile Families, Fragile Solutions: A History of Supportive Services for Families in Poverty* (Columbia University Press, 1999), *Rebuilding the Inner City: A History of Neighborhood Initiatives to Address Poverty* (Columbia University Press, 1995), and numerous articles and chapters on the effects of poverty on children and families, and the role of services in poor families' lives. Dr. Halpern is currently the Principal Investigator for a Chapin Hall study of the role of after-school programs in fostering low-income children's literacy, funded by the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds, and is working on a book on the history of after-school programs, to be published by Teachers College Press.

Julie Spielberger is a Senior Research Associate at Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. She is currently involved in research on children's literacy development in after-school programs and an evaluation of the Public Libraries as Partners in Youth Development Initiative (PLPYD), an approach to strengthening youth leadership and services and community partnerships in public libraries in low-income urban areas. Prior to joining Chapin Hall, she worked extensively in the training of Head Start teachers and as a researcher and consultant with Head Start family literacy programs. She has been an adjunct course instructor for Harold Washington College, Loyola University Chicago, and the Erikson Institute. For a number of years, she also managed consumer research for Playskool, Inc. She holds a Ph.D. in Child Development from the Erikson Institute, Loyola University Chicago, and an M.S.T. in Early Childhood Education from the University of Chicago.

Sylvan Robb holds a B.A. from the University of Michigan and an M.A. in Social Work from the University of Chicago. For five years, she was a Senior Research Analyst at Chapin Hall Center for Children, where she participated in the evaluations of two large-scale initiatives, MOST (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time) and the Neighborhood and Family Initiative. She is currently a Research Associate for the Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse at the Illinois Department of Human Services.

Related Chapin Hall Publications

A Case Study of the After-School Program in Chicago's Uptown-Edgewater Community
G. Baker 1998

"The Promise of After-School Programs for Low-Income Children." *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15, (2), 185-214
Robert Halpern 2000

The Role of After-School Programs in the Lives of Inner-City Children
Robert Halpern 1990

Making the Most of Out of School Time: Executive Summary of Interim Findings from an Evaluation Conducted by Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.
Robert Halpern, Julie Spielberger, Sylvan Robb 1998

Administrative Resources and Supports for Grassroots Youth Programs: The Challenges to Providers and Ideas for Targeted Support
Susannah Quern, Diana Mendley Rauner 1998

Youth and Caring: Developing a Field of Inquiry and Practice
Robert Chaskin, Theresa Hawley 1994

The Evolution of Youth Programming: Implications of Funding Trends and Agency Policies for Program Offerings
Susannah Quern, Diana Mendley Rauner, Darchelle Garner 2000

Beyond Home and School: The Role of Primary Supports in Youth Development
Sheila Merry 2000

A Self-Study Guide for Managers and Staff of Primary Support Programs for Young People
Joan Costello, Gary Barker, Lisa Marie Pickens, Neide Cassaniga, Sheila Merry, Adrienne Falcón 2000

To request a complete list of Chapin Hall publications and ordering information, call 773-753-5900.

Chapin Hall Center for Children
at the University of Chicago
1313 East 60th Street
Chicago, Illinois 60637

Cover photograph © 1996 Lloyd Wolf/Swanstc